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DEPT FOR SCA/FO, SCA/RA, EEB/TRA/OTP AND SCA/A
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SUBJECT: BUILDING AFGHAN CIVIL AVIATION CAPACITY

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B) 08 KABUL 1661
C) 08 Kabul 2977
D) 08 Kabul 3019
E) 09 Kabul 267

¶1. (U) This is an action request message. Please see para 14.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: International community efforts to support the Afghan civil aviation sector are poorly coordinated and lack coherence. The Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation (MoTCA) lacks capacity and leadership to manage effectively and safely Afghan civil aviation operations. NATO Brussels has proposed imposing a Brussels-led steering committee to advise the Government of the Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) in efforts to transition air space control to MoTCA. However, after consultations with ISAF, ICAO, and MoTCA officials, Post strongly believes that such an approach would be misguided. We believe a proposed Kabul-based Civil Aviation Working Group (CAWG) led by MoTCA that includes the U.S. military, ISAF, the USG, and major donors would be the most effective means of coordination and would better support the goals of the Afghan National Development Strategy. The CAWG would also be an appropriate vehicle to organize support for the development of Afghan human capacity, infrastructure, and technical operations in the future. These alternatives will be discussed at interagency meetings in Washington on February 23. END SUMMARY.

A Snapshot of the Civil Aviation Sector

¶3. (SBU) The Afghan civil aviation sector is in disarray with many actors, both military and civilian, working disjointedly to advise, guide, and manage a marginally capable Afghan Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation (MoTCA). Currently the U.S. Air Force (Central Command's Combined Forces Air Component Command (CFACC)) manages Afghan air traffic through the Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC). Under U.S. Forces Afghanistan (USFOR-A) and the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A), the U.S. military actively develops the capabilities of the Afghan National Army Air Corps (ANAAAC) for military air transport operations. GIROA lacks capability to secure the airports and the Afghans are far from minimum International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) compliance (reftel E). NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operates the major airports in Afghanistan. The Afghans are currently negotiating a deal with the Government of the United Arab Emirates for the Emiratis to provide security at Kabul and Kandahar airports through a British-based contractor. All other air operations are run, poorly, by the Afghan government.

14. (SBU) Within the framework of the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS), MoTCA is responsible for the rehabilitation, organization, and management of the civil aviation sector in Afghanistan. However, MoTCA's inability to manage day-to-day civil aviation operations and to develop long-term policy strategies places all civil aviation operations in jeopardy. The draft Civil Aviation Law remains at a standstill in the Ministry and still requires Cabinet approval before the President can send it to Parliament for debate and passage. Securing a modern civil aviation law that conforms to international standards is a critical component for developing civil air operations because it would authorize MoTCA to create a civil aviation authority (CAA). Without a CAA, MoTCA does not have the legal and regulatory framework needed to develop standards for safety and security.

15. (SBU) To further complicate matters, the Ministry has changed leadership twice in the last four months. In November 2008, President Karzai abruptly sacked the ninth minister of transport and civil aviation since 2001 amid allegations of corruption and mishandling of Hajj flight operations (reftels C and D). To date, MoTCA does not have an appointed minister. Deputy Minister for Technical Affairs Raz Mohammed Alami, a 40-year veteran of the ministry and one of MoTCA's few aviation technical "experts," is the Acting Minister; however, Alami's limited leadership skills in policy making, lack of close ties to the President, and his dated technical knowledge make him an imperfect solution to MoTCA's leadership vacuum. Below Alami, there are no officials in MoTCA with the technical knowledge, administrative skills, and policy acumen required to lead MoTCA from pre-Soviet era air operations and management into the 21st century.

16. (SBU) MoTCA has four foreign technical advisors: one from ICAO

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who advises Kabul International Airport (KIA) on airport operation standards and transition to Afghan control; one each from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA); and one from the U.S. Air Force to advise on air traffic operations. Without their daily support to the Ministry, particularly to Alami, in planning and problem solving, MoTCA would barely function. Recently Acting Minister Alami told FAA Rep that his priority is to shepherd the Civil Aviation Law through the cabinet so that it can finally be sent to Parliament; however, other more pressing day-to-day operational needs at MoTCA continually claim his time and divert his attention.

17. (SBU) Weak donor coordination and inadequate training of MoTCA officials have undermined donors' well-intentioned efforts to support aviation-related infrastructure projects. For example, the Japanese-funded USD 35 million state-of-the-art, international terminal at KIA remains empty and its jet-bridges unusable because MoTCA does not have the trained staff, money, or capability to manage such new technology. The Japanese have promised another USD 15 million to build a new air traffic control tower and fire station at KIA. The Germans are building a new runway and terminal at the Mazar-i-Sharif airport to support German provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) in the north. The Asian Development Bank has an ongoing USD 32 million project for regional airport development. Meanwhile, the GIROA struggles to find funding for an air traffic surveillance system to replace the current low-tech landline phone and GPS tracking system. Such a surveillance system would allow MoTCA to easily track air traffic and ensure greater safety of aircraft flying in Afghanistan, a key component to Afghanistan meeting ICAO standards (reftel E).

Proposal for NATO Brussels-Led Intervention

18. (SBU) Post understands that NATO Brussels' International Staff (NATO I.S.) has a proposal to revive the Civil Aviation Steering Committee, which existed 2004-07 but accomplished little and was rolled up when the ANDS was launched. This Steering Committee, using Brussels as a focal point, would bring together all elements of NATO concerned with Afghan air operations and advise MoTCA from Brussels on how to increase its technical and policy capacity to

manage civil aviation operations. An executive group would be advised by various advisory working groups including technical operations and air traffic control with the overarching goal of bringing Afghans to the point where they can safely and effectively manage their airspace and other civil aviation operations. While Post agrees with the end goal, we also believe this approach is misguided.

¶9. (SBU) NATO IS also tried one year ago to revive the Civil Aviation Clearing House and Steering Committee in an attempt to sideline the GIROA and allow the military effectively to manage civil aviation operations writ large (reftel A). While the GIROA lacks capacity to manage civil aviation functions, the ANDS process to which the USG and other major donors have committed calls on the international community to work in concert with the GIROA to develop the Afghans' ability to control their own airspace. As Afghanistan's main political forum for engaging the international community on economic development issues across all sectors, the Joint Coordinated Monitoring Board (JCMB) and the ANDS framework have superseded the NATO Clearing House/Steering Committee structure for civil aviation development. Competing, donor-driven frameworks like the NATO-Brussels led Steering Committee would alienate Afghan leadership and limit the capacity of MoTCA develop technical and policy-making capabilities.

A Civil Aviation Working Group
For Coordinated Action

¶10. (SBU) Acting Minister Alami has told FAA rep on numerous occasions that the Afghan government prefers a Kabul-centered advisory group, led by the Minister of Transport, that supports the ANDS. He strongly disagrees with a NATO Brussels-led group that relegates the Afghan government's participation to merely receiving instructions from Brussels. Moreover, Post is increasingly concerned that there are no efforts to prioritize infrastructure projects and no mechanism for coordinating donor engagement in the civil aviation sector. The NATO-Brussels proposal lacks any such mechanism. Therefore, in consultation with ISAF, MoTCA, and ICAO

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and with the aim of achieving shared objectives, Post has been working to organize a Kabul-based Civil Aviation Working Group (CAWG) to be chaired by the Minister or Acting Minister and with membership consisting of ISAF, ICAO, FAA, the U.S. Air Force, the U.S. Embassy, and, importantly, the major donors (Germany, Japan, Asian Development Bank, and the World Bank). ISAF, MoTCA, and the Embassy have tentatively agreed to aim for an early April launch of the CAWG.

¶11. (SBU) In a February 21 meeting with FAA rep and Econoff, Major General Charles Sullivan, the Director of ISAF's Air Coordination Element, strongly supported Post's efforts to develop a Kabul-based CAWG. Sullivan agreed that the working group is a critical component of coordination efforts that will gradually enable the Afghans to take over their airspace and allow NATO to cede control of Afghan airspace to the GIROA.

¶12. (SBU) Post believes the CAWG presents the following merits over the NATO proposal as a mechanism for organizing international support for Afghan civil aviation. The CAWG:
-- Involves Afghan leadership and thus ownership;
-- Is better linked to the ANDS;
-- Includes donor countries and is thus better placed to prioritize assistance projects;
-- Is Kabul-based, not Brussels-based; and
-- Offers greater potential to bring a strategic approach to strengthening civil aviation and transitioning to Afghan control.

¶13. (SBU) Post believes that improving coordination among donors, multilateral and bilateral, for the fledgling MoTCA will require close cooperation between civilian and military partners in Kabul and a strategic approach as a way forward. This approach would offer a framework, currently lacking, that would enable Afghans over time to replace international partners as managers of the civil

aviation sector. Such a proposal might usefully consist of four pillars: institution building, technical training, civil aviation operations and on-the-job training (OJT), and, lastly, infrastructure.

¶14. (SBU) For longer term consideration, Post notes that this four-pillar structure would require numerous civilian technical advisors to develop human capacity of MoTCA and could entail significant USG resources that have not yet been identified, if we decide to take on a leading role. FAA is developing a proposal for inter-agency consideration in the near future. An immediate decision to support the establishment of a CAWG in Kabul does no more than leave the door open to such a decision and protects the developing trust on the ground between civilian and military actors and the GIROA and the international partners with respect to civil air operations.

¶15. (SBU) ACTION REQUEST: Post recognizes the shared goals of NATO, ISAF, MoTCA, U.S. Air Force, and various Washington agencies in improving Afghan civil aviation capability to minimum compliance with ICAO standards and shifting responsibility of air operations over time to a capable MoTCA. To that end, Post strongly supports a Kabul-based, Afghan-led, civilian and military jointly coordinated effort to support the Afghan civil aviation sector. Post asks that the Department urge the Department of Defense to support the Kabul-based Civil Aviation Working Group that will work in concert with Afghan authorities in support of the ANDS. Post also recommends the Department advise USNATO of efforts to coordinate civil aviation development in Kabul and instruct USNATO to build support for this strategy with relevant NATO officials while opposing efforts by the NATO I.S. to revive ideas of enduring NATO control over Afghan airspace.

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